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ABSTRACT

The processes children use when learning to read and write seem mutually supportive, so the incorporation of writing prior to and in conjunction with reading seems advisable. Writing activities in the basal readers can be used instead of or along with parts of the core lesson, not just in the enrichment section. And by listening to a variety of literature, a child develops a sense of story. Beginning readers need to discover the rules of writing just as they discovered oral language: by practicing, making errors, and then receiving appropriate and positive feedback. For the older children, writing increases their awareness of printed words. The classroom should provide an environment that is filled with print, and the teacher needs to demonstrate that reading and writing are meaningful activities. (Twenty-six references are attached.) (RS)

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THE UNION OF READING AND WRITING (Conference Title)
A LOVE CONNECTION

Incorporating Writing with the
Basal Reading Series and Children's Literature

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Georgia Council- International Reading Association

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For numerous years writing instruction was based on the premise that children could not write if they were unable to read. Even though this seemed logical, current evidence supports the idea that writing often precedes reading and the development of composition skills facilitates learning to read (Clay, 1975; Chomsky, 1971). Because of the current emphasis on writing, many teachers are feeling the need to teach writing but are unsure as to the best way to obtain the results with a minimum amount of additional time required. The teacher of reading has access to excellent and varied literature. What better way to develop writing skills than to spring from the models provided in the basal series? Certainly the basal should not be the only source for writing, but through this much-used text, the teacher can continue guiding students through the material while incorporating writing into the daily lessons. Activities can be used instead of or along with parts of the core lesson, not just in the enrichment section as is often suggested by the authors. While preparing plans for the unit or daily lesson, the teacher need only substitute or add a writing activity to the prereading, vocabulary, or comprehension sections of the assignment. Imagination is the only limit!

For the beginning reader, the rationale for developing writing skills prior to reading seems sound. The child needs to discover the "rules" of writing, just as he/she discovers oral language: by practicing, making errors, receiving appropriate and positive feedback. When writing, the child must pay close attention to the details and features of print. Often unclear in speech, the writer discovers that words are segregated (Clay, 1975). He/she becomes

aware of the symbols that represent particular sounds, which is vital in learning to read. By observing good models, the child learns where to place letters on a page and that writing follows from left to right. By listening to a variety of literature, a child develops a sense of story. This exposure to stories also facilitates story organization on the part of the writer. All of these skills are essential in learning to read; reading will be so much easier if the child discovers these things prior to reading instruction.

For an older child, writing continues to increase her/his awareness of the printed word. If students are encouraged to revise and/or expand their writing, they develop a sense of audience. Thus, they begin to envision themselves in the role of an author and ask questions like, "What should I include to make my story understandable to others?" Murray (1984-1985) states that writing is at the center of any curriculum that teaches thinking because writing forces the students to think. Questioning can be accomplished in small groups and/or with the teacher, although the teacher should not always be the only audience. As the child questions her/his writing, he/she becomes a critical reader as well.

Allow the student the freedom to make mistakes. Errors or misconceptions can be important clues as to what the child knows and does not know. A teacher needs to focus on mistakes only after first looking at the meaning, creativity, and intent of the students' writing. Being sensitive to the reasons behind errors is an ideal "teachable moment." Through these explorations, a child learns by assimilating and accommodating new ideas. Children need to see what works and how to successfully participate in the writing game. A

teacher can be supportive and positive when errors occur, for without these mistakes, the child would not learn.

Classroom Environment

To feel that writing and reading are purposeful, the student needs to live in an environment filled with print. The classroom, as well as the home, should satisfy that requirement. The teacher may label various items in the room and demonstrate the importance of reading and writing by doing them. For writing instruction the student should be supplied with paper, pencils, dictionary, thesaurus, and whatever else may be necessary. Displays of students' writing should be abundant. A conducive atmosphere will help stimulate writing attempts.

For children to become competent in the language arts areas, two points are salient for successful learning. The first is that the learning must be perceived as meaningful for the learner. Authorities stress the importance for the child to self-select topics and write from her/his own experiences. A child learns to speak in order to communicate needs; there is a purpose. As educators that need should also be felt in learning to read and write. Assignments need not be busy work or empty in purpose. That leads to the second prominent item: the importance of the teacher. The effects of a teacher are difficult to measure, but are crucial to the child's learning. Teachers may need to view instruction in writing a little differently than in the past. A good model can provide students with an opportunity to see that writing and reading are meaningful, necessary skills. Children <u>can</u> write without knowing how to read.

Whether or not writing skills should be developed along with reading instruction is not proven; however, based on the recent findings of researchers and what we know about children's learning and development, evidence supports the inclusion of composing. Educators are looking more closely at the processes which children use when learning to read and write. The skills seem to be mutually supportive; therefore, the incorporation of writing prior to and in conjunction with reading seems advisable.

Responding to Students' Writing

Responses should be positive and geared to developing the skills of the young author. Know your students' abilities and evaluate them in terms of what "good" is for each individual, since capabilities will be diverse. The students need to view themselves writing as a critic, and you can demonstrate appropriate techniques. A writing teacher should be supportive of all student attempts. Have the student ask themselves to reflect (what was the experience really like?), expand (what else is important?), and select (what is most important?) (Sowers, 1982).

Responding needs to be personal; do what is comfortable for you and try not to sound like a broken record. Statements like "I like the way you . . ." are great, but can become trite and thus sound insincere. Taking notes is helpful in remembering parts upon which you wish to comment. Sometimes it is difficult to do, but find something positive to say about each piece. Be patient! Remember, children don't begin talking in complete sentences and neither do they start writing that way.

Responding

When discussing students' writing, first begin by summarizing the story showing the student what has been communicated to you and allow her/him to correct you if anything has been misinterpreted. Observe decoding skills, the content and organization, the sound-symbol associations, and the mechanics of the writing. Questioning may proceed in the following steps:

1. **What do you think of this piece of writing?** You want them to become critical readers of their own writing. This forces the student to make an independent judgment, since you have not yet reacted to the paper.
2. **Why do (or don't) you like it?** Again, they evaluate what is "good" about their writing.
3. Respond to the content by commenting on what interests you and by asking questions to clarify.
4. **How could you make it better if you wanted to change it?**
5. Respond positively to what the student has done correctly.
6. **What do you plan to do with this piece of writing now?** (File it, revise, group conference, publication.)
7. **What do you plan to do next?** Guide the student through a discussion of <u>how</u> the next step should be accomplished.
8. A particular skill or two may be taught and/or further editing suggested.

Adapted from Flemming, 1982.

Revision Checklist

1. Read your writing over carefully. If possible, read it aloud to a friend. Does it make sense? Is it clear? Have you left out anything?
*2. Did you use paragraphs? Does each paragraph come in a logical place in the writing?
*3. Look at the verb in each sentence. Can you think of a stronger verb?
4. Have you used enough details? Did you use picture words to help your reader <u>see</u> your writing?
5. Check mechanics--capital letters and punctuation.
6. Double-check the spelling of words you're not sure of.
7. Make a clean draft of the paper.
8. Exchange papers with a friend and read each other's carefully.
9. Have a conference with your teacher for any final changes.

*For more advanced writers

(Kirby & Liner, 1981)

Evaluating

By using folders to keep all of the students' papers, teachers, students, and parents can readily see how much has been accomplished. Points to be examined might include:

- Clarity of expression--Has the child's ability to express himself in writing improved?
- Inclusion of details--Is more important and interesting information included?
- Revision and editing--Has the child shown willingness to make changes in her/his writing? Is there evidence of increased skill with this process?
- Handwriting--Is letter formation improving?
- Spelling--Are there fewer common word errors? Is a first grader using more accurate beginning consonant sounds? Adding vowel sounds?
- Mechanics--Are periods and capital letters used more accurately in January than in September? Has Suzie started using quotation marks?

(Bingham, 1982)

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